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Editor's Introduction

Philip C. Kolin
University of Southern Mississippi, philip.kolin@usm.edu

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This general issue covers the spectrum of the arts in the South with essays, interviews, and reviews on art, film, history, literature, and popular culture plus original poetry and painting. Enjoy this feast of ideas and creativity.

The lead essay by Michael Kreyling looks at Faulkner's *Reivers* as both novel (1962) and film (1969) starring Steve McQueen and narrated by Burgess Meredith. Kreyling finds that the "two texts of the *Reivers* . . . pose the question of how to read Faulkner's last novel." Contextualizing the film, Kreyling maintains that "coming as it did at the end of the 1960's, and therefore saturated with stress and concern over civil rights in the US, it should have but did not contribute to progress on that front." While conceding that Faulkner was "deeply ambivalent about race and civil rights," Kreyling finds that the film version of Faulkner's novel unfortunately offered "nutrition-less entertainment at its best" and he blames the screenwriters (Harriet Frank, Jr. and Irving Ravetch), McQueen, and even Hollywood itself as well as white audiences in general for its shortcomings. Kreyling concludes that the "film version takes refuge in an all-male road movie ending" rather than a more paradoxical Faulknerian conclusion.

Studying Alice Walker's short short story, "Roselily" (published in 1967), Trudier Harris finds the African American tradition of call and response informing the heroine's wedding vows as she stands with her husband-to-be on the front porch of her home in Panther Burn, Mississippi. Calling and responding to the wedding vows are Roselily's thoughts about her children born out of wedlock, her relationship to their fathers and her ties—or lack thereof—to them, as well as to her guests. Harris claims that instead of being a happy occasion, the wedding highlights Roselily's precarious predicament as a "soiled" young woman in the South whose Muslim husband-to-be insists she move to Chicago. But the gaps between the wedding and Rose-

lily's thoughts, Southern and Northern culture and landscapes, and the bleak potential for any happy marriage only underscore the extent of Roselily's trouble. According to Harris, the symbolically named Roselily is heir to a blues tradition that cannot be relieved, and her migration to the North only belies the historical comfort that her predecessors sought. Overall, Walker's story for Harris highlights the cultural forms of call and response, blues, and the African American migration to illustrate the blighted expectations and potential unhappy consequences that Roselily will surely suffer.

The next two essays turn to art in and about the South. Art historian Henry Adams contends that Thomas Hart Benton's mural *America Today* (1930-31) "was one of the earliest notable works of art to portray the South . . . in modern terms." Adams points out that all the scenes in the mural, except those of New York City, were based on a sketching trip Benton made through the South in 1928. But Benton's concept of the South has not been recognized, Adams contends, in part because his view of the region was different from that of Southern Renaissance writers. Claiming that Benton was more in interested in the hill people than those of the tidewater, Adams finds that he focused not on nostalgic subjects but on contemporary scenes of men at work. Moreover, as Adams shows, Benton's notion of the South was expansive since it was shaped by the populist movement of the 1890s and included not only the states in the Deep South but many Western and Midwestern ones as well, including Benton's home state of Missouri. Adams concludes that "When Thomas Hart Benton became famous as a painter of the Midwest in the 1930s, it obscured the fact that his cultural viewpoint was essentially Southern."

Following Adams's discussion of Benton's South is an original "Memory Painting" by artist and poet Malaika Favorite about growing up in south Louisiana. Packed within the mélange of images in Favorite's South are trees, a rolling landscape, the Mississippi as well as the individuals who raised her. As she confesses, her family "carved . . . joy from the little that she had." Yet Favorite readily admits that her South, like Benton's, departed from traditional categorizations: "When I paint my definition of the South, I realize I am trying to express an enigma larger than the green cistern we drew water from when the community pipe broke." Even though Favorite's Louisiana "resonated with dust and permanence," it was not a place of "fixed realities." Her intensely symbolic "Memory Painting" reinforces these views through its vibrant images and measured perspectives, suggesting that the order of life "was determined by forces we could not see or comprehend but we knew existed."

Historian Christopher Morris next explores why and how antebellum Natchez blossomed as the intellectual center of the Trans-Appalachian West.

Arguing that the life of the mind remained vital in this small Southern town from territorial days through the Civil War, Morris points out that Natchez, "the most unlikely of places," nonetheless attracted attention from individuals around the country and abroad for its remarkable intellectual vitality. Yet he insists that even though science, literature, and the arts flourished in Natchez, those pursuits were always closely connected to slavery. The significance of this connection for the history of early Natchez, and the South as a whole, for Morris is thrown into relief when compared with Concord, Massachusetts, a town comparable in size to Natchez, that developed "social/intellectual institutions and circles at about the same time . . . but was not directly implicated in the institution of slavery." Consequently, Morris maintains that because of slavery the intellectual life of early Natchez is largely forgotten today whereas that of its mirror image, Concord, is well-remembered. This difference, Morris concludes, perhaps has "less to do with subjective estimates of the quality of the Natchez vs. Concord. . . [than how] the nation thinks about slavery."

The following two articles feature archival documents that shed light on Southern law and government. Searching the trial transcripts from the governor's papers housed at the Library of Virginia in Richmond, Jeff Forret uncovers cases in which slaves were convicted of capital crimes and analyzes one revealing case from Charles City County in 1839—*Commonwealth v. John*—where the enslaved defendant John was found guilty of murdering a white man, even though all the evidence indicated that it was a white relative of the deceased who had committed the crime. Though the court condemned the bondman John to hang, Virginia's governor commuted his sentence to sale and transportation out of the United States. While Forret admits that while the details of John's case were unusual, the outcome was nonetheless predictable because it conformed to a broad historical pattern in which black defendants encountered racial injustice before the law—something, Forret reminds us, that still happens today.

Southern Miss archivist Lorraine Stuart then retrieves a high school essay, "The Essentials of Good Citizenship," written in 1938 by Evelyn Gandy, the first woman in Mississippi to be elected to several high state offices, including Lieutenant Governor. Submitted to a Kiwanis essay contest, which Gandy won, "The Essentials of Good Citizenship," according to Stuart, looks forward to many of the political ideas and rhetorical devices that she employed in a long and highly successful career. Gandy's 990-word graceful essay, printed in full immediately after Stuart's introduction, also reveals her father's keen influence in shaping her progressive view of government in Mississippi. The essay is housed among Gandy's papers at Southern Miss, a rich trove for future research about Mississippi's political history.

This special issue also includes three new interviews, one with a distinguished Southern historian and the other two with poets, one of whom can claim a long career with many achievements while the other is at the start of an equally promising vocation. Civil War historian Susannah Ural interviews Victoria Bynum whose book *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* (2001) inspired the 2016 film *The Free State of Jones* starring Matthew McConaughey. The interview focuses on Newt Knight along with a hundred others who deserted the Confederacy in 1863, spurning what they termed "the rich man's war," to establish a fiercely protected enclave in Jones County, Mississippi, which, by the way, Bynum's ancestors called home. Bynum reflects on the complexity of Knight's motivation, his rural home, and on issues raised in the film on class, gender, and, most notably, Knight's relationship with the slave Rachel while he was still married to a white woman. Bynum also insightfully reflects on the ambiguities of the relationship between the film and the historical record. Though optioned in 2005, Bynum's scholarly book did not form the basis for the film, which, she admits, "elicit[ed] far more emotional intensity" than the heavily documented studies such as hers, "a well-sourced book, footnotes and all." Yet Bynum acknowledges that "Historically-based movies and historical works are in fact complementary. Both should inspire and inform us, despite our appealing to different senses: both should make us want to know more." Intriguingly, her cameo appearance in the film symbolizes the indisputable importance that the historian and history have, regardless of the media.

Next, Ralph Adamo, former editor of the *New Orleans Review* and current editor of *The Xavier Review*, interviews celebrated poet Rodney Jones (born 1950) about his identity, first as an American poet and then as a Southern one. Talking with Adamo, Jones recalls his friends' responses to his work, his poetic influences, and their comments on the effects of his cancer diagnosis on his poetry, his retirement from Southern Illinois University, where he taught for twenty-seven years, and his move to New Orleans. Throughout Jones's career, the intellect has remained a key part of his creative process. As he emphasizes, "The poem was and still is my detective, my metaphysical confidante." Jones also comments on his departures from previous work in his newest collection, a book-length poem entitled *Village Prodigies* (published in 2017), parts of which are threaded through Adamo's interview.

The third interview turns to Louisiana poet Katie Bickham (born in 1968) who discusses the significance of historical research to her larger narrative poems. In fact, as Meg Reynolds's interview stresses, much of Bickham's poetry is based on the principles of writing historical fiction. Her technique is unquestionably documentary, focusing on storytelling, though she alternates between "the stories of others and personal narratives." Bickham insists that

her poems continue to grapple with large historical issues of race and social justice in America and maintains poets have become better allies of people of color. Several of her poems, especially those in a recent issue of the *Missouri Review* featuring her work, take readers into the minds and hearts of Confederate women as well as their slaves who had to confront and survive the horrors of war on the home front. As with the Jones interview, Bickham's includes a new poem "My Mother Attends Her First Poetry Reading at Age Sixty-One" and an excerpt entitled "The Good News" from her forthcoming work.

Following these interviews are original poems from five poets with very different perspectives of the South and use widely different poetic techniques to express them. This issue concludes with a review essay on Southern novelists Truman Capote and Harper Lee and a review of a recent book on poet and novelist James Dickey.